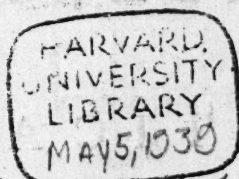


THE
FREEHOLDER'S
POLITICAL
CATECHISM.

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Prof. Robert F. Seybolt

THE
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QUESTION.

WHO are you?

Answer. I am T. M. a freeholder of Great-Britain.

Q. What privilege enjoyest thou by being a freeholder of Great-Britain?

A. By being a freeholder of Great-Britain, I am a greater man in my civil capacity than the greatest subject of an arbitrary prince; because I am governed by laws, to which I give my consent; and my life, liberty, and goods

cannot be taken from me, but according to those laws. I am a freeman.

Q. Who gave thee this liberty?

A. No man gave it me. Liberty is the natural right of every human creature. He is born to the exercise of it, as soon as he has attained to that of his reason; but that my liberty is preserved to me, when lost to a great part of mankind, is owing under God to the wisdom and valour of my ancestors, freeholders of this realm.

Q. Wherein does this liberty, which thou enjoyest, consist?

A. In laws made by the consent of the people, and the due execution of those laws. I am free not from the law, but by the law.

Q. Wilt thou stand fast in this liberty, whereunto thou art born and en-

titled by the laws of thy country?

A. Yes verily, by God's grace, I will; and I thank his good providence that I am born a member of a community governed by laws, and not by arbitrary power.

Q. What dost thou think incumbent upon thee, to secure this blessing to thyself and posterity?

A. As I am a freeholder, I think it incumbent upon me to believe aright concerning the fundamental articles of the government, to which I am subject; to write, speak, and act on all occasions conformably to this orthodox faith; to oppose, with all the powers of my body and mind, such as are enemies of our good constitution, together with all their secret and open abettors, and to be obedient to the King,

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the supreme magistrate of the society.

Q. Rehearse unto me the articles of thy political creed?

A. I believe that the supreme, or legislative power of this realm, resides in the King, Lords, and Commons; that his majesty King George the second is sovereign, or supreme executor of the law; to whom, upon that account, all loyalty is due; that each of the three members of the legislature are endowed with their particular rights, and offices; that the king, by his royal prerogative, has the power of determining and appointing the time and place of the meeting of parliaments; that the consent of King, Lords, and Commons is necessary to the being of a law, and all the three make but one lawgiver; that as to the freedom of consent in making of

laws, those three powers are independent; and that each and all the three are bound to observe the laws that are made.

Q. Why is the legislative power supreme?

A. Because what gives law to all, must be supreme.

Q. What meanest thou by loyalty to the King?

A. I have heard that Loy signifies law; and loyalty, obedience according to law; therefore he, who pays this obedience, is a loyal subject; and he, who executes the King's commands, when contrary to law, is disloyal and a traitor.

Q. Is it not in the law, that the King can do no wrong?

A. It is; for since Kings do not act

immediately by themselves, but mediately by their officers, and inferior magistrates; the wisdom of the law provides sufficiently against any undue exercise of their power, by charging all illegal acts, and all kinds of male-administration upon their ministers; by the great regard, which is paid to the King by this maxim, laying him under an indisputable obligation not to screen his ministers from publick justice, or publick enquiry.

Q. What dost thou mean by the royal prerogative?

A. A discretionary power in the King to act for the good of the people, where the laws are silent, never contrary to law, and always subject to the limitations of the law.

Q. Is not then the king above the laws?

A. By no means; for the intention of government being the security of the lives, liberties, and properties of the members of the community, they never can be supposed, by the law of nature, to give an arbitrary power over their persons and estates. King is a title, which, translated into several languages signifies a magistrate with as many different degrees of power, as there are kingdoms in the world; and he can have no power but what is given him by law; yea, even the supreme, or legislative power is bound, by the rules of equity, to govern by laws enacted, and published in due form; for what is not legal is arbitrary.

Q. How comes it that those, who endeavour to destroy the authority and independence of any of the branches

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of the legislature, subvert the constitution?

A. By the fundamental laws of the constitution, the free and impartial consent of each of the three members is necessary to the being of a law; therefore if the consent of any of the three is wilfully omitted, or obtained by terror or corruption, the legislature is violated; and instead of three there may be really and effectually but one branch of the legislature.

Q. Canst thou illustrate this by any example?

A. The royal authority and that of the house of Peers were both destroyed by the house of Commons, and by a small part of that, in the late civil war; so that the very form of government was annihilated.

Q. Can you give me an instance, where the form of government may be kept, and yet the constitution destroyed?

A. Yes. The forms of the free government of Rome were preserved under the arbitrary government of the Emperors. There was a Senate, Consuls, and Tribunes of the people; as one might say, King, Lords, and Commons; and yet the government under the Emperors was always despotick, and often tyrannical; and indeed the worst of all governments is tyranny sanctified by the appearance of law.

Q. By what means fell that great people into this state of slavery?

A. I have read the Roman history, and by what I can judge, it was by faction, corruption, and standing armies,

Q. All these things might happen to Romans: but did ever any parliament of this nation give up the liberty of the people?

A. Yes. A pack'd parliament, in Richard the second's time. Established by a law the King's arbitrary power, and with leave to name a commission with parliamentary authority. Parliaments in Henry the eighth's time, were slaves to his passions, and one gave the King a legislative authority. And there are many instances of parliaments making dangerous steps towards the destruction of the liberty of the people.

Q. Who were the English monarchs, who were the most indulgent to the liberties of the people?

A. The great King Alfred, who de-

clared that the English nation was as free as the thoughts of man ; the glorious monarchs, Edward the first, Edward the third, and Henry the fifth, who would not let his people swear to him till he had an opportunity of swearing to them, at his coronation ; and the immortal Queen Elizabeth, who declared it by law high treason, during her life, and a premunire afterwards, to deny the power of parliament in limiting and binding the descent, or inheritance of the crown, or the claim to it.

Q. When were those slavish maxims of hereditary, indefeazable right, and prerogative, superior to law, first introduced?

A. In the time of James the first; who, by endeavouring to establish them

laid the foundation of all the miseries which have since happened to his family; and it is the greatest security to the present branch of it, that such doctrines, which sow the seeds of jealousy between the King and his people, are by the present establishment quite exploded.

Q. What dost thou learn from those histories?

A. That a King of this realm, in the full possession of the affections of his people, is greater than any arbitrary prince; and that the nation can never be effectually undone but by a wicked parliament; and lastly, to be thankful to God that, under our present most gracious King, our constitution is preserved entire, though at the same time there are many circumstan-

ces, which call loudly for vigilance.

Q. What are those?

A. Such as have been the fore-runners and causes of the loss of liberty in other countries; decay of virtue and publick spirit, luxury, and extravagance in expence, venality and corruption, in private and publick affairs.

Q. How comes there to be a decay of publick spirit, when there is more than usual a desire to serve the publick?

A. If a desire to live upon the publick be a publick spirit, there is enough of it at this time; when extravagance makes people crave more, and the administration of a publick revenue (perhaps treble what it was before the revolution) enables the crown to give more than formerly.

Q. What dost thou fear from this?

A. That such as serve the crown for reward may in time sacrifice the interest of their country to their wants; that greediness of publick money may produce a slavish complaisance, as long as the crown can pay; and mutiny, when it cannot; and, in general, that motives of self-interest will prove an improper and weak foundation for our duty to our King and country.

Q. What wouldst thou do for thy country?

A. I would die to procure its prosperity; and I would rather that my posterity were cut off, than that they should be slaves; but as providence at present requires none of these sacrifices, I content myself to discharge the ordinary duties of my station, and to exhort my neighbours to do the same.

Q. What are the duties of your station?

A. To endeavour, as far as I am able, to preserve the publick tranquillity; and, as I am a freeholder, to give my vote for the candidate, whom I judge most worthy to serve his country; for if from any partial motive I should give my vote for one unworthy, I should think my self justly chargeable with his guilt.

Q. Thou hast perhaps but one vote of five hundred, and the member perhaps one of five hundred more; then your share of the guilt is but small.

A. As he, who assists at a murder, is guilty of murder, so he, who acts the lowest part in the enslaving his country, is guilty of a much greater crime than murder.

Q. Is enslaving one's country a

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greater crime than murder?

A. Yes; inasmuch as the murder of human nature is a greater crime than the murder of a human creature; or as he, who debaseth and rendereth miserable the race of mankind, is more wicked than he, who cutteth off an individual.

Q. Why is enslaving mankind murdering human nature?

A. Because mankind in a state of slavery and freedom is a different sort of creature; for proof of this I have read what the Greeks were of old, and what they are now in a state of slavery.

Q. What is become of the Heroes, Philosophers, Orators, and free citizens of Greece?

A. They are now slaves to the great Turk.

Q. What is become of the Scipio's
and Cato's of Rome?

A. They sing now on the English
stage.

Q. Does not the tranquillity, occa-
sioned by absolute monarchy make the
country thrive?

A. Peace and plenty are not the
genuine fruits of absolute monar-
chy; for absolute monarchies are more
subject to convulsions than free govern-
ments, and slavery turneth the fruit-
ful plains into a desert; whereas liber-
ty, like the dew from heaven, fructi-
fieth the barren mountains. This I
have learn'd from travellers, who have
visited countries in both conditions;
therefore, as I said before, I should
reckon myself guilty of the greatest
crime human nature is capable of, if I

were any ways necessary to the enslaving my country. Though I have but one vote, many units make a number; and if every elector should reason after the same manner, that he has but one, what must become of the whole? a law of great consequence, and the election of the member, who voted for that law, may be both carried by one vote. Great and important services for the liberties of their country have been done by ordinary men. I have read that the institution of the Tribunes of Rome, or the whole power of the Commons, was owing to a word spoke in season by a common man.

Q. Is it not lawful then to take a bribe from a person otherwise worthy to serve his country?

A. No more than for a judge to

take a bribe for a righteous sentence; nor is it any more lawful to corrupt, than to commit evil that good may come of it. Corruption converts a good action into wickedness. Bribery of all sorts is contrary to the law of God; it is a heinous sin, often punish'd with the severest judgments; it involves in it the sin of perjury, as the law stands now; and is besides the greatest folly and madness.

Q. How is it contrary to the law of God?

A. The law of God saith expressly, Thou shalt not wrest judgment; Thou shalt not take a gift. If it is a sin in a judge, it is much more in a lawgiver, or an elector; because the mischiefs occasion'd by the first reach only to individuals; that of the last may affect

whole nations, and even the generations to come. The psalmist, describing the wicked, saith, his right hand is full of bribes. The prophet, describing the righteous, tells us, he shaketh his hands from holding a bribe. Samuel, justifying his innocence, appeals to the people, of whose hands have I taken a bribe? Then as to divine vengeance, holy Job tells us, that God shall destroy the tabernacle of bribery. Achan's avarice, who had appropriated to his own use the golden wedge and the Babylonish garment, brought the judgment of God upon the whole people, so that they fled before their enemies, till the criminal was discover'd and stoned to death. The leprosy adhered to Gehazi (the servant of Elisha) and his house for ever, for taking a bribe from Naa-

man, a rich minister of a great prince. Therefore he, that taketh a bribe, may justly expect what is threaten'd in holy writ; he shall not prosper in his way, neither shall his substance continue; his silver and gold shall not be able to deliver him in the day of the wrath of the Lord.

Q. Why is he that taketh a bribe, guilty of the sin of perjury?

A. Because he sweareth,

‘ I A. B. * do swear (or being one of
‘ the people called Quakers, I A. B.
‘ do solemnly affirm) I have not receiv-
‘ ed, or had by myself, or any other per-
‘ son whatsoever in trust for me, or for
‘ my use or benefit, directly or indirect-
‘ ly, any sum or sums of money, of-

* This oath is enjoined by the late glorious act for preventing bribery and corruption at elections.

‘ fice, place or employment, gift or reward, or any promise or security for any money, office, employment or gift, in order to give my vote at this election; and that I have not before been polled at this election.

Q. What thinkest thou of those, who are bribed by gluttony and drunkenness?

A. That they are viler than Esau, who sold his birth-right for a mess of porridge.

Q. Why is taking a bribe folly, or madness?

A. Because I must refund ten-fold in taxes of what I take in elections; and the member, who bought me, has a fair pretence to sell me; nor can I, in such a case, have any just cause of complaint.

Q. What wilt thou say then to the candidate, that offers thee a bribe?

A. I will say, 'Thy money perishes with thee! as thou art now purchasing thy seat in parliament, I have just reason to suspect thou resolvest to sell thy vote. What thou offerest, and what thou promisest may be the price of the liberties of my country. I will not only reject thy bribe with disdain, but will vote against thee.'

Q. Is not the justice of a King sufficient security for the liberty of a people?

A. The people ought to have more security for all that is valuable in the world, than the will of a mortal and fallible man. A King of Britain may make as many peers, and such as he pleaseth; therefore the last and best se-

curity for the liberties of the people, is a house of commons genuine and independent.

Q. What meanest thou by a genuine house of commons?

A. One, that is the lawful issue of the people, and no bastard.

Q. How is a bastard house of commons produced?

A. When the people by terror, corruption, or other indirect means, chuse such as they otherwise would not chuse; when such as are fairly chosen, are not returned; when such as are returned, are turned out by partial votes in controverted elections, and others not fairly chosen set in their places.

Q. How may a house of commons become dependent?

A. When the freedom of voting

is destroyed by threatnings, promises, punishments, and rewards; by the open force of the government, or the insults of the populace; but above all by private influence; for they, who are armed with the power of the crown, have many ways of gratifying such as are subservient to their designs, and many ways of oppressing such as oppose them, both within the bounds of the law.

Q. Can a King have a more faithful council than a house of commons, which speaketh the sense of the people?

A. None; for they will not only give him impartial counsel, but will powerfully and chearfully assist him to execute what they advise.

Q. What are the marks of a person, worthy to serve his country in

parliament?

A. The marks of a good ruler given in scripture will serve for a parliament-man; 'such as rule over you shall be men of truth, hating covetousness; they shall not take a gift; they shall not be afraid of the face of a man,' Deut. xvi. Therefore I conclude, that the marks of a good parliament-man are riches with frugality; integrity; courage; being well-affected to the constitution; knowledge of the state of the country; being prudently frugal of the money, careful of the trade, and zealous for the liberties of the people; having stuck to the interest of his country in perilous times, and being assiduous in attendance.

Q. Who is most likely to take a bribe?

A. He, who offereth one.

Q. Who is likely to be frugal of the people's money?

A. He, who puts none of it in his own pocket.

Q. You seem by this to be averse from chusing such as accept places and gratuities from the crown. What is your reason for this partiality?

A. I am far from thinking that a man may not serve his king and his country faithfully at the same time. Nay, their interests are inseparable. Mr. Such an one, my lord's steward, is a very honest man; and yet if I had any affairs to settle with my lord, I would chuse my neighbour for a referee rather than my lord's steward.

Q. Why is frugality of the people's money so necessary at this time?

A. Because they have run out much, and are still much in debt. My father and I have paid our share of one hundred millions, and I have heard there are near fifty more to pay. I grudge not this prodigious expence, as far as it has been the necessary price of liberty; but as it would grieve me much to see this blessing ravished from me, which has cost me so dear; so on the other hand I think it expedient to save, now the affair is over, and the government settled.

Q. Who are those, who are so careful of the trade of the nation?

A. Such as are willing to keep it from all vexatious interruptions by inspections, entering into houses, seizures, suits; and the oppression of tax-gatherers, as much as possible; such as are willing to take off the burthensome

duties which encrease the expence of the workman, and consequently the price of the manufacture.

Q. But as you have a freehold, would you not be willing to be excused from paying two shillings in the pound, by laying excises upon other parts of our consumption?

A. No doubt but every landed man would be glad to be free from paying two shillings in the pound; but, at the same time, I would not raise, by another tax, two shillings in the pound, nor one shilling in the pound for a perpetuity; for parliaments, who have no more to give, may be disappointed for redress of their grievances. Besides, I would not be deluded by an impossibility; for if my tenant has any new tax laid upon him,

I am afraid he will not pay me so much rent; so that the new tax must still affect land. Then it is utterly impossible to raise by excises what shall be equivalent to two shillings in the pound, without the ruin of trade; for the excises, which are settled already, generally speaking, raise double the duty on the people, of what they bring into the government.

Q. How canst thou prove that?

A. By experience of several excises, as of leather, candles, soap, &c. Whatever is brought into the publick by those excises is raised double upon the people; therefore if a million of money, or what is equivalent to two shillings in the pound, were levied by excise, it would be two millions on the excised commodities, which must destroy

every subject of trade in Britain.

Q. Why do'st thou insist that a knowledge of the state of the country is a necessary qualification for a parliament-man?

A. Because this is a qualification, of late, very much unheeded. I have heard that there are many corporations, which never saw their members.

Q. Is then a writ of parliament only a conge d' elire for a bishop, where the King nominates?

A. God forbid! the crown is never to meddle in an election.

Q. Why is assiduous attendance so necessary?

A. Because a parliament-man is intrusted with the lives, liberties and properties of the people, which have often been endangered by the non-atten-

dance of many members; because, if representatives do not attend, I may have a law imposed upon me, to which I had no opportunity of giving my assent.

Q. Thou hast prudently and justly resolved to promote, to the utmost of thy power, the publick tranquillity. What are the advantages thou proposest from that?

A. All the advantages resulting from political society depend upon the publick tranquillity. Besides, by publick tranquillity, armies, which are a mark of distrust of the affections of the people, may be disbanded.

Q. Why do'st thou not love armies, in time of peace?

A. Because armies have overturned the liberties of most countries; and all, who are well-affected to liberty,

ever hated them; because they are subject to an implicit obedience to their officers, and to a law of their own; because they are so many lusty men taken from work, and maintained at an extravagant expence upon the labour of the rest; because they are many ways burthensome to the people in their quarters, even under the best discipline, especially in dear countries; because there are so many preferments in the hands of designing ministers; and lastly, because the King will never be denied an army as great as he pleaseth, when it is necessary.

F I N I S.